DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 867 CG 015 099

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TITLE Self-Perceptions of Mental Health and Attractiveness Status in the Interpersonal Marketplace.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); Adolescents; *Dating (Social); Emotional Adjustment; *Interpersonal Attraction; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Psychological Characteristics; Psychological Needs; Rapport; *Self Concept; Self Esteem; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Young Adults

ABSTRACT

The centrality of self-perceptions in the dynamics of human relationships and personality is a well-documented empirical fact. Feelings of personal happiness and psychological adjustment were studied in relation to self-perceptions of individual worth in the interpersonal marketplace. Male and female single college students between 17 and 30 years of age completed a brief self-rating survey form for 2 experiments. Results indicated that single young adult men and women reporting relatively less difficulty in attracting romantic love-mates saw themselves as significantly happier and better-adjusted psychologically than did students who experienced difficulty in gaining such attention. Data suggest that an empirically-based, systematically-evaluated therapeutic approach should be developed from further research in this area and would be useful in a wide variety of applied settings. (Author/KMF)

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ED200867

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1980

CG 015099

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Self-Perceptions of Mental Health and Attractiveness Status in the Interpersonal Marketplace

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The centrality of self-perceptions in the dynamics of human relationships and personality is now a well-documented empirical fact (Kleinke, 1978). One line of investigation which has been almost (Pellegrini, Hicks, & Meyers-Winton, 1980) totally ignored, however, has to do with evaluative judgments about oneself as a commodity in the marketplace of romantic love. The scarcity of such research is surprising in view of: (a) preoccupation with the "mating game" reflected pervasively throughout the imagery of popular culture (i.e., music, television, movies, theater, advertising, etc.); (b) recurrent reference to the importance of love needs in established theories of personality (e.g., Fromm, 1941, 1947, 1955; Maslow, 1955, 1968, 1970, 1972); and (c) abundant evidence as to the importance of attractiveness in interpersonal attraction (Clore, 1976; Dermer & Thiel, 1975; Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972; Walster, Aronson, Abrams, & Rottman, 1966). Working from theoretical and empirical considerations as noted in (b) and (c) above, it is reasonable to expect that attitudes toward one's own desirability and success in the mate-attraction marketplace are significantly related to, and most probably correlated positively with, individual differences in emotional well-being and overall personal adjustment.

As is often the case when it comes to conjecture concerning the human condition (Pellegrini, 1977), the wisdom of common sense, anecdotal

observation, and folklore, lead to equally plausible, though totally contradictory views as to the relationships between attractiveness, happiness, and adjustment. There is on the one hand, the image of "the beautiful people" as those who have the best of it all, emotionally speaking, as they go through life savoring the choicest nectar from the vine of romantic love, while on the other is the equally popular stereotype of the most attractive among us as somehow tormented by emotional turmoil in their lives.

But aside from speculation, whether developed out of formal-technical or informal-intuitive rationales, there are no clear data whatsoever from research directed specifically to this fundamental issue in the psychology of personality and adjustment. The two quasi-experimental (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) studies reported here were thus conducted to initiate exploratory inquiry along these lines.

Experiment I

The first experiment was designed to test for possible relationships between self-evaluations of desirability-success in romantic love-mate attraction and personal happiness.

Method

Subjects

A test sample of 100 respondents, 50 males and 50 females, was drawn from large sections of General Psychology in which participation in the study was voluntary and unanimous.

Procedure

A total of 225 male and 225 female single young adult college students between 17 and 30 years of age, filled-out anonymously a brief survey form requiring a 20-point Likert-type self-rating on the following item: "Generally speaking, how easy is it for you to win the romantic love of a person of the opposite sex to whom you are attracted?" The response scale for this item was anchored at the low end by 1 = "very difficult," and at the high end by 20 = "very easy." On the same form, which included 18 buffer items dealing with attitudes toward a variety of social issues, respondents were also required to give a 20-point Likert-type self-rating on the following item: "Generally speaking, how happy do you tend to be?" The response scale for the latter item was anchored at the low end by 1 = "I'm usually a very unhappy person," and at the high end by 20 = "I'm usually a very happy person."

Results

The test sample of N = 100 was constructed by selecting out the completed rating forms of those respondents with the highest and lowest

self-ratings on the measure of romantic love-mate attractiveness status, using n = 25 per sex for the extreme score comparisons. The "Lows" were thus the 25 males and 25 females who gave themselves the lowest self-ratings, and the "Highs" were the 25 males and 25 females who rated themselves highest on the mate-attraction status item. In order to validate the assumption of a reliable difference between levels on this variable, a 2 (Sex) x 2 (Extreme Score Condition) factorial analysis of variance was conducted. This analysis indicated a statically significant outcome only for the main effect on the Extreme Score factor, on which the mean for Highs (M = 19.10, SD = .86) was, as expected, much higher (F = 3537.17, df = 1/96, p < .001) than the corresponding mean for Lows (M = 3.74, SD = 1.61).

The self-ratings of personal happiness for respondents in the test sample (N = 100) are summarized in Table 1. A 2 (Sex) x 2 (Extreme Score Condition) factorial analysis of variance on these data showed a statistically reliable difference only for the main effect on the Extreme Score factor, on which self-ratings of happiness were found to be significantly higher (F = 21.10, df = 1/96, p < .001) for those who rated themselves high (M = 16.84, SD = 2.53) on the potential for attracting romantic love-mates, as compared to people who rated themselves low (M = 13.64, SD = 4.20) on this characteristic. Neither the main effect on the sex factor, nor the interaction were significant.

Insert Table 1 about here

Experiment II

Given the results of Experiment I, a second experiment was conducted to test the generality of the relationship between perceptions of one's own status in the interpersonal marketplace, and mental health. The method was exactly the same as in the first experiment, except that in place of the item dealing with personal happiness, respondents were asked to rate their own "overall psychological adjustment" on a 20-point Likert-type scale, anchored at the low end by 1 = "not at all well-adjusted," and at the high end by 20 = "extremely well-adjusted."

Results

As in the first experiment, in order to validate the assumption of a reliable difference between levels on the variable of self-perceived mate-attraction status, a 2 (Sex) x 2 (Extreme Score Condition) factorial analysis of variance was conducted. As in the first experiment, a statistically significant outcome was established only for the main effect on the Extreme Score factor, on which the mean for Highs (M = 19.01, SD = .85) was markedly higher (F = 3496.35, df = 1/96, $p < .001$) than the corresponding mean for Lows (M = 3.82, SD = 1.64).

The data on self-ratings of personal adjustment for all respondents in this second test sample (N = 100) are summarized in Table 2. As in the first experiment, a 2 (Sex) x 2 (Extreme Score Condition) factorial analysis of variance indicated a statistically reliable difference only for the main effect on the Extreme Score factor, where self-ratings of psychological adjustment were found to be significantly higher (F = 19.10, df = 1/96, $p < .001$) for those who rated themselves high (M = 16.64, SD = 2.42) on their love-mate attraction potential, as compared to people

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Insert Table 2 About Here
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who rated themselves low ($\underline{M}$ = 13.90, $\underline{SD}$ = 3.69) on this trait. Once again, neither the main effect on the sex factor nor the interaction were significant.

Discussion

Taken together, the results of Experiments I and II support the hypothesis that feelings of personal happiness and psychological adjustment are strongly related to self-perceptions of one's own value in the interpersonal marketplace. In short, these data indicate that single young adult men and women who report relatively easy success in attracting romantic love-mates, see themselves as significantly happier and better-adjusted psychologically than do those who find it difficult to win such attraction.

The importance of love and belongingness needs to the development and maintenance of mental health has long been acknowledged in formal theories of personality, especially those within the humanistic tradition (e.g., Maslow, 1968, 1970, 1972). Congruent with this point of view, some of the most widely-used contemporary approaches to counseling and psychotherapy (e.g., Glasser, 1975) focus on helping the client develop more effective behavioral means of fulfilling the needs to love and be loved. Our results fit well with such formal psychological principles, and with the experiential sense of everyday life reality which suggests that effectiveness, or at least the self-perception of effectiveness, in attracting romantic love-mates is likely to be related to a general "feeling good" about oneself.

These studies leave unanswered a number of questions as to how the observed outcomes may covary with differences in personal characteristics of the individual such as family background, occupation, developmental history, and current status in intimate relationships. More importantly, some provocative possibilities are suggested for research into ways in which the emotional "warm-glow" or "gloomy haze" (Isen, 1970; Pellegrini, Hicks, & Meyers-Winton, 1979), respectively, of perceptions of one's own mate-attraction status may affect a wide range of interpersonal behaviors including the following: (a) formation of interpersonal evaluative impressions in situations such as courtroom jury deliberations, teachers' attitudes toward pupils, etc.; (b) interpersonal attraction responses in in vivo encounters; (c) bargaining and negotiation in conflict circumstances; (d) self-disclosure styles; (e) expression of altruistic behaviors; and (f) persuasibility.

From a clinical-therapeutic standpoint, however, the most productive direction for subsequent inquiry might be to focus on those individuals whose responses do not fit the pattern of significant outcomes found here. Thus, it would be of interest to identify coping style differences that account for why some people who see themselves as ineffective in winning love-mate attraction describe themselves as unhappy and poorly adjusted, while others, whose self-perceived mate-attraction status is equally low, describe themselves as happy and well-adjusted. Assuming that such differences could be ascertained reliably, attention could then proceed to the matter of how to teach the more realistically adaptive coping modes to people whose current adjustmental patterns operate to deter fulfillment in their own life. In view of the centrality of

self-perceptions and intimacy in the processes of total adjustment, an empirically-based, systematically-evaluated therapeutic approach developed out of such research could be useful in a wide variety of applied settings.

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Footnote

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Table 1
Personal Happiness Ratings

Sex	Self-Perceived Attractiveness Status[1]: High	Low	
Males	M = 17.12 SD = 2.39 n = 25	M = 13.16 SD = 4.63 n = 25	M = 15.14 SD = 4.16 n = 50
Females	M = 16.56 SD = 2.69 n = 25	M = 14.12 SD = 3.76 n = 25	M = 15.34 SD = 3.46 n = 50
	M = 16.84 SD = 2.53 n = 50	M = 13.64 SD = 4.20 n = 50	

[1]High scores indicate greater happiness.

Table 2

Personal Adjustment Ratings

Sex	Self-Perceived Attractiveness Status[1] High	Low	
Males	M = 17.04 SD = 2.47 n = 25	M = 13.68 SD = 4.13 n = 25	M = 15.36 SD = 3.77 n = 50
Females	M = 16.24 SD = 2.35 n = 25	M = 14.12 SD = 3.26 n = 25	M = 15.18 SD = 3.01 n = 50
	M = 16.64 SD = 2.42 n = 50	M = 13.90 SD = 3.69 n = 50	

[1]High scores indicate better adjustment.